

A Whistle in the Woods

Leaves of red and gold crunched under her heavy steel toed boot. The tall thinning trees loomed ominously overhead. The path was hauntingly familiar, but she had never trekked it before, at least not as of late or anytime that she could remember. But despite this she walked the overgrown path as if she had a hundred times before, one foot in front of the other as the deep purple bushes scurried past and the wind whistled in her ears. Her cherry nose was turned towards the sky, basking in the warm sun before it vanished behind big gray clouds that tumbled and rolled over each other like eager puppies. The cold clung to her cheeks and ears, making them burn, although not in a particularly painful way.

Her eyes watered from the cold and she pulled her obnoxiously yellow raincoat closer to herself, trying to keep warm as the sun lowered in the fiery orange sky. She rounded past a crooked maple tree whose leaves had long since fallen and she noticed a big leaf as yellow as her coat resting on the ground. She stooped down to pick it up, her fingers dug into the dirt below it, getting under her fingernails. She brushed off the leaf and set off with it for no reason, just something to hold as her arms waved about her side. Eventually along the way she collected a hooked stick and dragged it behind her as if it were a nuisance, occasionally poking things along the path.

The girl, who I will now be referring to as Olive, came across a charming creek that babbled incessantly. It had big enough stones to cross without getting wet, and little minnows and tadpoles swam beneath the surface, as if searching for a place to get warm. Water bugs skated across effortlessly and disappeared before she could get a closer look. She followed the creek for a ways before it entered into the brush and she couldn't get past, so she walked along that instead, searching for something interesting to find and take home to add to her collection that filled the shelves lining her bedroom walls.

She heard a loud rumbling in the distance. It interested her, but she was hesitant to run for it, after all it might be a bear of sorts, or perhaps it was a gunshot from some nearby hunters. After some thought she determined that it didn't sound like a gun shot nor a bear and started towards it, although she found a bigger stick to defend herself with.

The rumbling had stopped and she couldn't quite remember where it had come from, so she walked unsurely as she went deeper into the forest. Not too long after she had begun the thicket, hence the name I suppose, was almost too thick for her to get through, and her coat sleeve snagged on a branch. It got progressively darker as she went and crows began to caw from seemingly nowhere. The forest once filled with sunshine that made the remaining leaves in the trees glow and the red and oranges and golds of fall pop was now desolate, and the leaves were dead and matted with dirt on the ground. The tree branches became more crooked and created a roof over her head, making it seem as if it were the middle of the night.

A chill ran up her back and she regretted going so far, but she couldn't turn back now, besides she could barely remember where she'd come from. She could see her breath billow out before her face, and her hands trembled from the cold.

The rumbling began again and she bounded in its direction. And luckily for her it left the deep dark of the woods and she crawled through into a grove. The leaves were like fire, brighter red and orange and gold than she'd ever seen before. There was a strong earthy scent in the air and she breathed in the sweet pine. Relieved to be in the light again she felt better about venturing onwards.

“Hellooooo,” she cried out, pulling one of the worst moves she possibly could have if it were a horror movie, “Is anyone out there?”

The rumbling answered her, this time it was so close she jumped, whipping around to see a big nest of leaves, and in the center a buffalo sized dragon the color of a penny. At first she didn't see it, her eyes glazing over the slumbering daydream. When she saw it she broke out into a grin.

“Gladius! What are you doing here?” She gasped, outstretching her hand and running it over his long scaly snout. His bulging amber eyes opened and steam escaped his flaring nostrils. He stretched like a cat that had napped too long and rolled over onto his side, his wings that were far too big for him outstretched towards the ebony treetops.

In Elmside, the sleepy but cozy town with which she resided, was just West of the Julaenn mountains, where dragons came in hoards. Olive had managed to befriend Gladius on a bout of luck when she was hiking through the woods.

Gladius made a deep purring sound as she rubbed his nose affectionately. She settled down next to him and looked up at the sky that was slowly turning all sorts of purples and blue, the stars appearing in the sky like sugar on a chalkboard. Gladius was warm and his feathery hide was soft and downy, as he was a young dragon. Olive laid against his side and heaved a contented sigh. Her nose filled with his smoky scent and she coughed, leaning forward into the cool night air. She'd better be headed off before her mother began to worry. There was probably warm soup stewing and a kettle of tea brewing on the stove. The lights glowing out of the windows of her cabin that was nestled comfortably in a bed of trees. The radio must be on by now, playing her mothers favorite oldies as she sat snuggled up in her thick wool blanket, checking the time for no apparent reason. The smell of cinnamon pinecones made itself at home there, and her father must be sitting at the kitchen table, whittling away at a chunk of wood, his face hardened but not unkind. Olive should be there now, hugging him goodnight, the familiar comforting scent of tobacco and pine on his thick flannel shirt. She should be there, climbing into her bed and cuddling deep into her covers, as the stars outside her window danced in the sky. She *should* be there now.

Gladius growled again and the night was still.